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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2016

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SUBJECT: DARFUR: NOV. 16 SPECIAL ENVOY NATSIOS MEETING WITH
EGYPTIAN FM GHEIT

Classified By: POLOFF ERIC WONG. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 16 bilateral meeting prior to UN-AU-GOS consultations on Darfur, Egyptian FM Gheit asserted that Sudanese FM Lam Akol was "very forthcoming," and highlighted Sudan's acceptance of UN assistance to the African Union's peacekeeping operation in Darfur. While the GOS had concerns about the role UN troops would play in a hybrid UN-AU operation, "technical units" such as a transportation battalion could have its own security elements. FM Gheit noted that President Mubarak and Libyan leader Qadhafi planned to meet jointly with Sudanese President Bashir, but provided little detail on the approach they would undertake. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan Natsios and AF/SE Andrew Steinfeld, accompanied by deputy pol-econ counselor (note-taker), met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit prior to the convening on November 16 of a special "high-level" meeting on Darfur at African Union headquarters, co-chaired by UN SYG Annan and AU Commission Chairperson Konare and involving the P-5, Sudan, the League of Arab States, the European Union, and selected African countries (septel).

¶3. (C) SE Natsios began the 30-minute meeting by underscoring the need to achieve consensus on issues to be discussed at the high-level session on Darfur, a list of which had been developed by UK Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn. Natsios informed FM Gheit that he had warned Sudanese FM Lam Akol to inform President Bashir that continuation of deliberate attacks on civilians risked having the USG curtail its cooperative approach with the GOS. Seeking compromise would be easier if the GOS stopped backtracking on Darfur: e.g., seeking a protocol in response to the joint letter from UN SYG Annan and AU Commission Chairperson Konare describing the UN's "light" assistance package to the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS). NGOs, unable to obtain visas, were withdrawing from Darfur. Natsios added that in response to GOS concerns that punitive action be taken against non-signatories who opposed the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, the USG was considering imposing travel sanctions on 5 JEM leaders, although not on Dr. Khalil Ibrahim.

¶4. (C) Egyptian FM Gheit responded that Sudanese FM Lam Akol was "very forthcoming." GOS Presidential Adviser Dr. Mustafa

Osman Ismail had said that no protocol (among the GOS, UN, and AU) was needed for the implementation of the UN's "light" assistance package. The GOS had accepted the first two stages of phased UN assistance to the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), FM Gheit said, but the third phase, proposing a hybrid peacekeeping operation, remained a contentious issue for Sudan. Of particular concern to the GOS was whether the UN would provide either "technical units" or troops for a protection force; a transportation battalion could have its own security elements, FM Gheit observed. He added that he had told Mustapha Osman that peacekeepers could use dual emblems (i.e., both UN and AU insignia).

15. (C) FM Gheit concluded by observing that President Mubarak and Libyan leader Qadhafi would jointly meet with Sudanese President Bashir, and invited the USG to convey specific concerns for Mubarak to raise with Bashir.

16. (C) COMMENT: Egyptian FM Gheit's assessment that Sudanese FM Lam Akol is "very forthcoming" underscores Egypt's support for GOS positions and its lukewarm support for full transition of AMIS to a hybrid or UN peacekeeping operation. Representatives of AU member states and the AU Commission note that Egypt has consistently sought to weaken AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) communiqués to protect GOS interests. As the chair of the 15-member AU PSC in December, Egypt is not expected to convene any PSC meetings to discuss Darfur, nor initiate any action within the AU to advance the consensus adopted by the November 17 high-level session chaired by Annan and Konare. END COMMENT.

17. (U) SE Natsios' staff cleared this message.
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